

The Effect of Three Phase Approach on Iranian EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

This research examined the strategies employed in the *Three Phase Approach* (Pre-reading /During-reading / Post-reading) stages of instruction language learning. This study aimed at determining the difference in the strategy use by each stage at Pre-Intermediate level. To fulfill the purpose of the study, a piloted sample *Preliminary English Test* (PET) was administered to a total number of 30 Iranian female teenage EFL learners at Kish Language School, Tehran. Then, the Homogeneity test was administered to a total number of 120 Iranian female teenage EFL learners and 80 learners were homogenized to pass the pre-test. The selected participants were then non-randomly assigned into three experimental groups: Pre-reading / During-reading / Post reading. In one of the groups, the pre-reading tasks, in the second group, the while-reading tasks and in the last group, the post-reading tasks were practiced through 10 sessions and at the end of the course, the participants in each group were given the reading section of another sample PET as a posttest to measure their reading comprehension. Subsequently, the mean score of all three groups and the control group on the posttest were compared which led to implying that the null hypothesis was supported. In other words, no significance difference was found between the three experimental groups – pre, post and during reading – and the control group.

Keywords: reading strategies, three-phase approach, reading comprehension

Introduction

Reading is, perhaps one of the most important of all language skills. Because of significance of the reading skill and the existing need in developing this skill, teachers should search for finding best ways to equip their teaching procedure, techniques and resources to improve in the field of reading, as well.

In spite of the crucial role of reading, many students have still problems concerning reading and understanding different types of texts. This seems true even if the learner possess a considerable amount of linguistic knowledge. Therefore, it can be suggested that there are some non-linguistic factors involved in the process of reading comprehension. These are called “*strategies*”.

Reading strategies can be defined as deliberate and conscious process by which the reader attempts to overcome a problem (Oxford, 1990). Reading strategies are of interest for what they reveal about the way readers manage their interaction with written text and how these strategies are related to text comprehension.

Regarding reading strategy use Chastain (1988) found the following:

Students do not need to know all the vocabulary and grammar to comprehend a major portion of the text to recreate the author's meaning. They can learn to read at a much higher level of proficiency than in the past when the pre-occupation with grammar deprived them of the

opportunity to read for meaning. They can learn reading strategies that enable them to read for gaining more information and knowledge (p.224).

While some research studies have been done on the nature of readers' application of strategies, few of them have investigated the effects of strategy training on the reading comprehension. Based on the problem mentioned, the present study aims to answer the research questions considering the effect of *Three Phase Approach* on the reading comprehension of Iranian Teenage EFL learners. Therefore, foreign language teachers should design and prepare meaningful exercises, which will lead to assist communication between the writer and the reader in order to work on the information in the reading itself. The activities should be flexible, varied, and be chosen to suit the text. It is fundamental to take the author's point of view into consideration for a full understanding of the text.

Pre-reading activities may be designed to motivate learner's interest, activate prior knowledge or pre-teach potentially different concepts and vocabulary. This is also a great opportunity to introduce comprehension such as cause and effect, compare and contrast personification, main idea, sequencing, and others.

In *During-reading* stage students should have opportunity to confirm predictions, gather and organize information, and begin making generalizations about new understandings gained from the text.

The main purpose of *Post-reading* phase is to check for accurate comprehension of the text. By using simple post-reading strategies, teachers can help learners derive meaning from what he has read and address any misunderstandings that he/she may have encountered.

Background of the study

Rivers (1981, p.259) explains that reading is not only aimed at providing information and pleasure for the reader, but it also helps extend one's knowledge of the language.

Reading is not merely a receptive process of picking up information from the page in a word-by-word manner (Grabe, 1991). Rather it is a selective process characterized as an active process of comprehending. Therefore, non-English-speaking readers find it important to employ reading procedures to read English texts more effectively. According to Oxford and Crookall (1989), strategies can be operationalized as learning techniques, behaviors, and problem solving or study skills as learning more effectively and efficiently.

Brantmeier (2002,p.1) summarizes the strategies for reading comprehension as follows: "the strategies may involve skimming, scanning, guessing, recognizing cognates and word families, reading for meaning, predicting, activating general knowledge, making inferences, following inferences, and separating main ideas from supporting ideas". Furthermore, the reading strategies can consist of evaluating content, such as agreeing or disagreeing, making an association with prior knowledge or experience, asking and answering questions, looking at the key words, verb or object of sentence, skipping and re-reading (Almasi, 2003; Sugirin, 1999).

Reading is an interactive process between the reader and the text which leads to automaticity or reading fluency. In this process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text as he/she tries to elicit the meaning and where various kinds of knowledge are being used: linguistic or systematic knowledge (through *bottom-up* processing) as well as schematic knowledge (through *top-down* processing).

Davis (1995) groups activities into two kinds:

Passive and *Active*. Passive reading activities include silent reading to respond to multiple exercises, true-false statements, superficial comprehension questions, gap-filling exercises vocabulary, and dictionary work. These activities offer limited potential for learning because they

involve silent reading and they do not require students to read deeply to infer answers to the questions. Once students simply locate the information in the text, they are likely to find the correct answer.

On the other hand, active reading tasks require students to go beyond a superficial reading of the text to read “between the lines”. The tasks involve students working together in pairs or groups, with or without guidance on the part of the teacher in order to negotiate answers to questions. Active reading tasks encourage readers to voice their own opinions about the text and discuss those opinions with other students and the teacher. Another advantage of such tasks is that they contextualize reading; that is, they allow the readers to see the text as part of a broader social context that includes the writer and the readers (Tomitch 2000).

Active tasks may include creating diagrams and filling in tables. Grabe (1997) suggests that by making use of diagrams and tables, students can better understand the coherence and logic of the information being presented in the text and will be able to locate the main ideas and distinguish them from less important information. Davis (1995) proposes other kinds of active reading tasks such as book reviews, summary writing, and note-taking. These require students to work individually with guidelines from the teacher.

Research Questions

According to the problem stated above, the following researches questioned were posed:

1. Do *pre-reading* activities have any effect on enhancing Iranian EFL learners reading comprehension?
2. Do *During-reading* activities have any effect on enhancing Iranian EFL learners reading comprehension?
3. Do *Post-reading* activities have any effect on enhancing Iranian EFL learners reading comprehension?
4. Is there any significant difference between the effects of pre/during/and post-reading activities on Iranian EFL learners’ reading comprehension?

Reading Activities through Three-Phase Approach

In this part activities in three stages of reading will be examined.

Pre-reading Stage

The pre-reading stage attempts to:

- improve students' interest in the topic, and motivate them,
- provide some predicting/guessing activities for the reading passage,
- make use of students’ background knowledge about the topic,
- prepare the students for the context of the reading passage,
- build a bridge between the reading passage and the learners’ background knowledge, and interests.
- In pre-reading activities, students are asked to:
 - find answers to given questions based on the text;
 - give their personal opinion about the topic;
 - predict the continuing text
- In critical pre-reading activities, students can be asked to consider:
 - the reason the author is writing about the topic;
 - the whole range of ways to write a particular text;
 - the generating of their own list of questions. (Varaprasad, 1997)

During-Reading Stage

This stage aims to improve:

- students' understanding the writer's purpose, the language structure and the logical organization in the reading text,
- developing and helping comprehension for the reading text content,
- helping students use their own inferring and judging abilities,
- reminding the students of the importance of vocabulary for contextual clues for meaning and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words,
- helping students make use of cross-cultural elements,
- helping students develop their linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge,
- learning to generalize on the issue under discussion,
- reading consciously,
- skimming (looking for general information),
- scanning (looking for specific information).

Post-reading Stage

The aims of post-reading work are:

- to help students use their acquired knowledge in similar readings,
- to help them integrate their reading skills with the other language skills: listening, speaking and writing,
- to help them integrate with the foreign culture,
- to make use of key words and structures to summarize the reading passage,
- to extract the main idea of a paragraph or a reading text,
- to interpret descriptions (outlining and summarizing),
- to make use of classroom games for reading.

Methodology*Participants*

The participants in this study were 80 Iranian female EFL learners at Kish Language School, Tehran. All participants were aged between 14 and 17 and at the pre-intermediate level of language proficiency who attended a 21-session course held two days a week, each session lasting for one hour and half. The participants were selected among 110 pre-intermediate students at the same language school based on their scores on a language proficiency test previously piloted among 30 learners with the very similar language background. The 80 participants who obtained a score of one standard deviation above and below the mean in PET (Preliminary English Test) among the 110 who sat for the test were selected and subsequently assigned randomly into the three experimental groups (20 participants in pre-reading group, 21 participants in during-reading group, and 18 participants in post-reading group) and one control group with 21 participants. The Pretest reading questionnaire, containing 5 parts selected from the reading part of the same PET of the proficiency test was first piloted among 30 learners in very same level. After treatments in each experimental group, the posttest, PET reading questionnaire very similar to the pretest reading questionnaire after piloting was administered among all 80 participants including experimental groups and control group.

Instrumentations and Materials

To carry out the present study, the researcher employed a number of instrumentations as tests, scoring rubrics, and instructional materials as discussed below;

Preliminary English Test: A mock Preliminary English Test (PET) designed by Cambridge was used as a language proficiency test in order to make a homogeneous sample in terms of the language proficiency level. Naturally, it was first piloted among 30 learners with nearly the same characteristics as the target sample and was then administered to the real participants of the research. The participants whose score fell one standard deviation above and below the mean of the sample on the test were selected. The Preliminary English Test for Schools (PET fS) is a pre- intermediate level exam, set at level B1 of the council of Europe's Common European Framework for languages. The content and treatment of topics in PET for Schools have been particularly targeted at the interests and experience of school pupils.

Pretest: The reading paper of the same PET was administered before treatments as the pretest to the three experimental groups and a control group.

Posttest: The reading paper of another sample PET was used as the posttest and administered to both (experimental and control) groups at the end of the course.

Course Book : The main course book used in both groups was “Pacesetter” by Strange and Hall (2005), which is designed specifically for teenagers with a communicative approach that presents the new language in contexts relevant to teenagers and in ways which actively involve them in the learning process. Every unit of the book covers all four language skills as well as pronunciation and vocabulary to develop the learners’ fluency and confidence in understanding and using English.

Pacesetter, as the course book for teenage learners, takes teenage learners from the beginner to the intermediate level through four books (Starter, Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, and Intermediate). The Pre-intermediate Pacesetter contains 15 main units and three consolidation units. In the present study, two levels of the Pre-intermediate Pacesetter were selected – Pre-intermediate 3 and 5 – and each level covers three units in 21 sessions.

Three-Phase Approach Activities

In text for the particular study, 6 texts suitable in length and difficulty level for the learners in three groups were adopted from various sources and covered in 10 sessions during the course in each group. The texts used in all three groups were sports, inventions, shipping, and, etc... The difference between the three groups lay in the procedure of teaching the texts, strategies of which appear in the procedure section below.

Procedure

As noted earlier, this study began with piloting a mock PET, designed by Cambridge ESOL, among 30 pre-intermediate learners at Kish Language School. Secondly, the same reading papers out of PET test as the proficiency test used among 30 pre-intermediate learners as piloting. Following a through item analysis and reliability estimate, the test was administered to 110 female EFL learners thereby selecting the 80 learners whose total score fell one standard deviation above and below the mean on the test. Subsequently, the selected participants were randomly assigned into three experimental groups, with 20 participants in pre-reading group, 21 participants in during-reading group, 18 participants in post-reading group and one control group of 21 participants. Secondly, the same reading papers out of PET test as a pretest used among participants, which had been administered among 30 pre-intermediate learners as piloting. Finally, another very similar reading questionnaire out of PET test, piloted before, was administered among 80 participants as a posttest.

As the researcher had to accommodate the treatments into the usual program of the course, she allocated the first session to the PET test as a proficiency test 1 out of session to the pre-test among all four groups, 10 out of the 21 sessions of the course to the treatments in each experimental group and finally 1 session to the posttest reading questionnaire very similar to the pretest reading

questionnaire among all four groups. Three-phase Approach (pre/during/and post) reading strategies, as the treatments, were practiced every other session in each class. It should be also noted that the learners did not know that they were under study but were told that they were going to have some more practice on their reading during the course.

The researcher introduced the tasks to the learners in each group in the first session and encourages them to participate actively in the tasks to improve their reading skill.

Data Analysis Methods

A series of both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data in this study. After piloting the PET, item analysis was conducted and the reliability of the test was estimated. Descriptive statistics was also conducted on the actual PET administration and also the posttest with an independent samples *t*-test run in order to verify the hypothesis of the study. Moreover, as two raters scored the writing and speaking sections of the PET used for homogenization, the inter-rater consistency of the two was also checked. For all parametric tests employed, normality checks were conducted a priori. The researcher was also interested in the effect of interaction of different variables in this study. So, two-way ANOVA was run to compare the mean scores of the achievement tests of the students.

Results and Discussions

Participant Selection

To select the participants required for this study, the researcher used a general English test. Prior to this administration, the test was piloted to make sure that it could be used confidently for this screening. The sections below describe the details of these two consecutive processes of piloting and administration plus the further measures the researcher took to ensure as much homogeneity as possible in the two experimental groups prior to the treatment.

Descriptive Statistics of the Proficiency Test Piloting

This study began with piloting a mock *Preliminary English Test (PET)* for schools among 30 pre-intermediate learners at Kish Language School bearing almost the same characteristics as the target sample. The PET included four sections of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Table 1. Testing Normality Assumption

Group		N	Skewness			Kurtosis		
		Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Post Reading	PET	18	.609	.536	1.14	-.830	1.038	-0.80
	Pretest	18	-.199	.536	-0.37	-.872	1.038	-0.84
	Posttest	18	-.095	.536	-0.18	-.885	1.038	-0.85
During Reading	PET	21	.822	.501	1.64	-.512	.972	-0.53
	Pretest	21	-.240	.501	-0.48	-.583	.972	-0.60
	Posttest	21	.572	.501	1.14	.256	.972	0.26
Pre Reading	PET	20	.801	.512	1.56	-.423	.992	-0.43
	Pretest	20	-.258	.512	-0.50	-.486	.992	-0.49
	Posttest	20	.479	.512	0.94	-1.183	.992	-1.19
Control	PET	21	.804	.501	1.60	-.456	.972	-0.47
	Pretest	21	-.349	.501	-0.70	-1.292	.972	-1.33
	Posttest	21	-.434	.501	-0.87	-.809	.972	-0.83

Hypothesis testing

In order to see whether we can use parametric or non-parametric, the assumption of normality and homogeneity of variances should be met. As it is clear from table 1, the former assumption was met. The ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors are within the ranges of ± 1.96 .

PET General Language Proficiency Test

The PET general language proficiency test was administered to 110 subjects. Based on the mean ($M = 61.68$) plus and minus one standard deviation ($SD = 13.76$) 80 subjects were selected to participate in the main study. The KR-21 reliability index for the PET was .88.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for PET

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	KR-21
PET	110	61.68	13.795	190.306	.88

The parametric one-way analysis of variances was run to compare the pre, during, post reading and control groups' means on the PET test in order to prove they enjoyed the same level of general language proficiency prior to the main study. Before discussing the results it should be mentioned that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's $F(3, 76) = .022, P > .05$).

The post-reading ($M = 62.28, SD = 9.53$) showed the highest mean on the PET. This was followed by during reading ($M = 60.10, SD = 9.39$), pre-reading ($M = 60.05, SD = 9.28$) and control group ($M = 59.24, SD = 9.12$).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics PET by Groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Post-Reading	18	62.28	9.535	2.247	57.54	67.02
During Reading	21	60.10	9.391	2.049	55.82	64.37
Pre-Reading	20	60.05	9.282	2.076	55.71	64.39
Control	21	59.24	9.121	1.990	55.09	63.39
Total	80	60.35	9.214	1.030	58.30	62.40

Based on the results displayed in Table 4 ($F(3, 76) = .36, P > .05, \omega^2 = .026$ representing a weak effect size) it can be concluded that there were not any significant differences between the means of the four groups on the PET test (as a pretest). Thus it can be concluded that they enjoyed the same level of general language proficiency prior to the main study.

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA for PET by Groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	96.020	3	32.007	.368	.776
Within Groups	6610.180	76	86.976		
Total	6706.200	79			

Considering the results in table 5, the post-reading ($M = 19.44$, $SD = 5.43$) showed the highest mean on the pretest of reading comprehension. This was followed by during reading ($M = 18.62$, $SD = 5.14$), control ($M = 18.24$, $SD = 5.12$) and pre-reading group ($M = 16.50$, $SD = 5.07$).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for pretest of reading comprehension by groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Post-Reading	18	19.44	5.437	1.281	16.74	22.15
During Reading	21	18.62	5.143	1.122	16.28	20.96
Pre-Reading	20	16.50	5.073	1.134	14.13	18.87
Control	21	18.24	5.127	1.119	15.90	20.57
Total	80	18.18	5.199	.581	17.02	19.33

Based on the results displayed in Table 6 ($F(3, 76) = 1.10$, $P > .05$, $\omega^2 = .004$ representing a weak effect size) it can be concluded that there were not any significant differences between the means of the four groups on the pretest of reading comprehension. Thus it can be concluded that they enjoyed the same level of reading ability prior to the main study.

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA for pretest of reading comprehension by groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	89.344	3	29.781	1.106	.352
Within Groups	2046.206	76	26.924		
Total	2135.550	79			

The first three research questions targeted any significant differences between the three experimental groups – pre, post and during reading – and the control group. A one-way ANOVA was run to compare the four groups on the posttest of reading comprehension. The results of the post-hoc Scheffe's tests were used to probe the first three research questions.

Table 7 displays the descriptive statistics for the four groups on the posttest of reading comprehension. The post-reading ($M = 21.61$, $SD = 5.03$) showed the highest mean on the posttest of reading comprehension. This was followed by pre-reading ($M = 20.35$, $SD = 4.82$), during reading ($M = 18.95$, $SD = 4.27$) and control group ($M = 18.52$, $SD = 4.03$).

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for posttest of reading comprehension by groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Post-Reading	18	21.61	5.031	1.186	19.11	24.11
During Reading	21	18.95	4.272	.932	17.01	20.90
Pre-Reading	20	20.35	4.826	1.079	18.09	22.61
Control	21	18.52	4.033	.880	16.69	20.36
Total	80	19.79	4.608	.515	18.76	20.81

Based on the results of the post-hoc Scheffe's tests in table 8, first, it can be concluded that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-reading ($M = 20.35$) and control ($M = 18.52$) groups on the posttest of reading ($MD = 1.82$, $P > .05$). Thus, the first null-hypothesis as pre-reading activities did not have any effect on enhancing Iranian EFL learners reading comprehension was supported. Second, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the during-reading ($M = 18.95$) and control ($M = 18.52$) groups on the posttest of reading ($MD = .42$, $P > .05$). Thus, the second null-hypothesis as during-reading activities did not have any effect on enhancing Iranian EFL learners reading comprehension was supported. Third, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the post-reading ($M = 21.61$) and control ($M = 18.52$) groups on the posttest of reading ($MD = 3.08$, $P > .05$). Thus, the third null-hypothesis as post-reading activities did not have any effect on enhancing Iranian EFL learners reading comprehension was supported.

Table 8. Multiple comparisons, posttest of reading comprehension by groups

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Post	During	2.659	1.457	.350	-1.51	6.82
	Pre	1.261	1.473	.865	-2.95	5.47
	Control	3.087	1.457	.222	-1.08	7.25
During	Control	.429	1.400	.993	-3.57	4.43
Pre	During	1.398	1.417	.808	-2.65	5.45
	Control	1.826	1.417	.647	-2.22	5.88

According to table 9, the results of the independent t-test ($t(78) = 1.47$, $P > .05$) representing a weak effect size indicate that there was no significant difference between the experimental groups and the control group' mean scores on the posttest of reading comprehension. Thus, it can be concluded that the fourth null-hypothesis as there was not any significant difference between the effects of pre/during/and post-reading activities on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension was supported.

Table 9. Independent samples test for posttest of reading comprehension by groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.215	.274	1.474	78	.144	1.713	1.162	-.600	4.027
Equal variances not assumed			1.594	41.138	.119	1.713	1.075	-.458	3.885

Discussion

Although, this study showed that using Three-Phase Approach can be useful in order to motivate students for reading in the case of using proper text, considering their ages and desires, the null hypothesis was supported that there is no significant difference between the effects of pre/during/post-reading activities on Iranian EFL learner's reading comprehension.

As Jacobs and Small (2003) note and as reconsolidated in this study, the *Three-Phase Approach* method combines conventional teaching procedures such as topical warm-up, explicit vocabulary instruction and possibly grammar correction with a new type of meaning-based reading activity. A Three-Phase Approach reading class embodies several important principles of language learning such as learner autonomy, cooperation among learners; focus on meaning and self and peer-assessment.

Language, learners were engaged in authentic communication and were helping one another. Three-Phase Approach provided learners with enough time to become familiar with the intended topic in each session and that they were engaged in the tasks and seemed to be enjoying it.

The Three-Phase Approach, procedure involved learners in both decoding and encoding the message and as the teacher/researcher observed during the instruction, it enhanced their reading as well as their writing and communication skills. It pushed learners to produce a meaningful text while cooperating with other learners. The task provided learners with a sense of achievement and encouraged them to think about the process of their language learning. In short, if it is implemented correctly, the Three-Phase Approach can be rewarding to both teachers and learners.

Conclusion

At first, as it explained before, the researcher administered the pilot PET test among EFL learners and the same reading for the pretest reading for the same students in the total number of 30 participants in the pre-intermediate level.

Secondly, the same PET test used among 110 EFL pre-intermediate learners and 80 learners were homogenized and randomly divided into three experimental groups (pre-reading/ during-reading/ and post reading) as well as one control group.

Although the researcher tried to choose the best and the most proper exercises for each experimental group as treatment, the mean and standard division been estimated and proved the null hypothesis which emphasized on no significant difference between the effects of pre/during/post-reading activities on Iranian EFL learner's reading comprehension.

This research showed that there is no remarkable difference between those learners who treated with the tasks related to pre-reading/ during-reading/ and post-reading activates, but it shouldn't be forgotten that as the researcher mentioned at the beginning of this research motivating students, making them enthusiastic in reading and showing them how to get the meaning beyond the text was considered too.

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